

A TRIP TO SERAMADIA CAMP IN NORTH IRAQ July 28th- 31st 1939

We left Habbaniya in a Valentia at 4.30 a.m. on July 28th and flying due North with the Tigris River on our right passed over Baiji, the northern terminus of the railway, then saw Mosul over to our right, then crossing the Tigris landed at the little aerodrome of Simel at 7.30 a.m.

Cars were waiting for us and we set off after a few minutes up the road. About a quarter of an hour brought us to Dohuk, a picturesque town with trees.

Then on up a hill road for about 20 miles where we stopped for brekker amongst pine trees, the only ones we saw.

Swara Tarka
pass.

Away again and up a pass and down several hairpin bends and along near a place named Aradine, thence on to Bebaidi where the R.A.F. Transport camp is situated.

Bebaidi

We went on two miles to Solave, from where the path goes up to Seramadia. This is 60 miles from Simel.

Solave is at 4000 ft and is a pretty little village in a valley.

Here the others took to mules but I preferred to walk and so set off up the Gorge on the 2000 ft climb to the camp.

After doing 1000ft, the camp came into view and there was a little chaikhana or tea place. I did not stop for tea as lunch was waiting for us at the camp.

Lunch and a rest, and then a cup of tea and a round of the camp and finally dinner and bed, very welcome.

Saturday. Morning round the camp looking at the water supply and other things, then off to the Levy Camp to see their Saturday inspection and then lunch with the O.C. Capt. Cottingham of the Gloster. Regt.

After lunch, we set off three miles to an Assyrian Wedding party.

On arrival, the band came down to meet us and escorted up to a Koprana or shelter made of oak uprights covered with oak leaves, in which were the Bride and Bridegroom.

The bride was veiled, but we shook hands and wished her good luck.

We then sat down on pillows and rugs, and were given fruit and wine and arrack.

After a time the dance began and we joined in. They form a circle and to a jig tune dance round, a girl between each man, holding hands, with the pipe and drum in the centre.

The men were all in their national costume. Bright baggy trousers, a bright coloured jacket with a cummerbund surmounted by a leather belt, in which is stuck an ornamental dagger.

The girls also wore bright coloured dresses with a large silver belt buckle, and silver ornaments round their necks.

They wear a black scarf made into a headdress which is also bedecked with golden coins.

The people were ever so nice and none of the Eastern demand of bakshish.

They are all Nestorian Christians, and have no homes since they were driven out of Turkey, they are just wanderers now with no country

Sunday 30 th July

The party left at 7.30 a.m. mostly on mules and we went off down the hill, past a koprana village and on down through stunted oak trees for forty minutes till we reached a spring where we halted and had a drink. Then on along a long slope with the little stream beside us till we reached the village of Haise.

The road then began to rise slightly and I had to walk hard to keep up with the mules, which I had easily beaten down the hill.

Suddenly we came to the top of a cliff with the river hundreds of feet below and the path zig-zagged down very steeply. The mule riders had to walk and the mules went down by themselves.

After going along a rocky ledge we got near the stream and leaving the mules on the path we descended a steep path to the water. Doraje
Gmz.

There we bathed in the torrent which was grand and we had our lunch about 11 a.m.

After an hours bathing, we set off again up the ravine and passing two little villages reached Duri.

Here we were met by the Bishop who led us to a vine bower and produced ice cold water and then another lunch.

Large flat breads, bowls of soup, plates of rice and chicken, and then fruits of all sorts, peaches, apples, grapes - a feast for a king.

As we had a long way home, we had to hasten, and after a nice rest and repast, we went through the village, very clean and tidy, to the old Assyrian church.

The key was made of wood and the door only three feet high blocked by a large stone.

This was done in the old days to prevent the Turks being able to rush in and massacre the congregation. The old church was a vaulted room and so cool - no seats as the people have to stand or kneel for the hour the service takes.

Up on the crags above the village, there another church built in a cavern, which we had not time to go and see - this is only used occasionally now for special ceremonies.

We saw the old bible, beautifully decorated and written by hand by some old priest.

The old Bishop has lived in America for seven years as an exile after the War. He had assembled a body of men to assist the British against the Turks before the Assyrians had to retreat into Urmia in Persia. He has indeed lived in perilous times and even now has no guarantee of security under the Iraqis.

We said goodbye to him at the Church and started for home, taking another route over the hill to Haise, instead of the road through the gorge.

It meant a climb of some 800 feet.

I walked all the back as far as Haise and then as it getting late and I didn't want to delay the party and also had to go off at three the following morning, I took to a mule up the last four miles up the hill.

However I had not done badly to do about 20 miles on the hills, not having walked like that for six months.

